



**You have downloaded a document from
RE-BUS
repository of the University of Silesia in Katowice**

Title: Artificial beauty of cosmopolitan women : the beauty myth in horoscopic discourse

Author: Anna Miś

Citation style: Miś Anna. (2016). Artificial beauty of cosmopolitan women : the beauty myth in horoscopic discourse. "Prace Naukowe Akademii im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie. Studia Neofilologiczne" ([Nr] 12 (2016), s. 91-104), DOI: 10.16926/sn.2016.12.07



Uznanie autorstwa - Licencja ta pozwala na kopiowanie, zmienianie, rozprowadzanie, przedstawianie i wykonywanie utworu jedynie pod warunkiem oznaczenia autorstwa.



UNIwersYTET ŚLĄSKI
W KATOWICACH



Biblioteka
Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



Ministerstwo Nauki
i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

Anna MIŚ
(Uniwersytet Śląski w Katowicach)

ARTIFICIAL BEAUTY OF COSMOPOLITAN WOMEN – THE BEAUTY MYTH IN HOROSCOPIC DISCOURSE

Summary

Engrossed in contemporary myths, often unconsciously, minds are implemented with various, often unreasonable ideas and ideologies. The successful functioning of the beauty myth comes as no surprise in the culture of excess, in which the focus dares to be on what purely economically and politically beneficial at a given moment. The paper aims at deciphering the specificity of the beauty myth's mechanism relying upon linguistic devices of analysis. The first part introduces the main purposes of the study, assumptions for the research and builds up a theoretical background to it. The second part constitutes a presentation of the observations made, a critical discourse analysis and an attempt at a socio-linguistic analysis of the beauty myth which manifests itself in the compiled horoscopes.

Keywords: discourse, beauty, horoscopes, women, myth, magazine.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary discourse concerning female appearance, the beauty myth seems to have taken over the helm. It is the images, both visual and linguistic-cultural, promoting beauty-oriented ideologies that build it up, dictate fashions, prescribe behaviours and empower the economy. Since the process has escalated to a global scale and, with its take-no-prisoners approach, implements more and more negative or destructing ideas into people's minds, it seems reasonable and justified to investigate its mechanism and encourage a discussion concerning its ongoing and further possible ramifications which are by no means limited to taking care of one's appearance, following centuries-old and modern stereotypes, or lowered self-esteem, but are manifested in far more threatening psycho-somatic disorders, hurting healthy body practices, painful body rituals and deaths.

2. Purposes of the research

The fundamental idea around which the article oscillates is the beauty myth. In order to introduce the problem, a critical discourse analysis is conducted. In the quoted discourse about female beauty, her body and identity, there hides the linguistic-cultural picture of a contemporary woman, which constitutes a useful datum for later consideration and research. The second part concerns the functioning of myths in general and of the beauty myth, as exemplified with horoscopic discourse.

Throughout centuries, discursive and non-discursive practices have been taking part in creating acceptable and desirable attitudes and behaviours, prescribing the economically and politically beneficial ones. This manipulation and establishing power relations prove that discourse does not only mirror, but appears to be a unique vicious circle of reflecting and creating reality.

Finally, a linguistic perspective on myth is presented so as to hand out for a methodology making it possible to describe the beauty myth's functioning in the contemporary social reality. The very beauty myth is also discussed to show how images of beauty are used against women and what traps and paradoxes it hides.

3. General methodological assumptions

One could risk a statement that a contemporary woman has been created by a myth. The myth operates in discourse manifesting itself through language. Here, the phenomenon is discussed as exemplified by one genre – horoscope. One may be surprised by the choice of horoscopes for illustrating the beauty myth. However, it seems probable that it shows even there, and spreads imperceptibly. What supports the choice of corpus is a prescriptive function of horoscopes basing upon the Pygmalion effect mechanism and the overall context in which they appear – the magazine website promoting a particular vision of femaleness and modernity.

As already mentioned, the basic assumptions that have to be made for the sake of this article concern two areas – discourse and myth, both within the framework of horoscopes in this particular case. Obviously, they do not operate in isolation. They do not just happen. On the contrary, there is constantly a mutual correspondence between them for a simple reason – the fundamental element and matter of each is language. Also for this reason, they not only *are*, but also *do* something. They exist in a specific context and serve particular functions.

Let this be a tour into the heart of discourse, thanks to which the functioning of the beauty myth is, hopefully, illustrated in linguistic terms.

4. Discourse and the linguistic picture of the world

It is worth analysing the horoscopic discourse critically. In it, there hides the linguistic-cultural picture of contemporary women, which is assumed to be mythical here. In discourse, whose matter is language, myths of various kinds settle in. Just like discourse, they considerably affect social constructions.

Since discourse and discourse analysis can be approached in different ways, it is necessary to establish the view adopted for the sake of the following research. As Scollon and Scollon (2003: 538) claim, “on the one hand, it refers to the close linguistic study, from different perspectives, of texts in use. On the other hand, discourse refers to socially shared habits of thought, perception, and behaviour reflected in numerous texts belonging to different genres”.

Both approaches need to be realised – text-as-a-tool and text-as-a-mirror. Or rather discourse, that is, as Cook (1992: 2) explains, “text and context together, interacting in a way which is perceived as meaningful and unified by the participants (who are both part of the context and observers of it)”. Though no typical genre analysis is carried out because of space and content limitations assumed, the approach adopted is the one in which discourse is treated as an intentional language use in specific social situations and cultural context, reflecting at the same time to a certain extent the actual state of matters. Here, the discourse is assumed to be reflected in horoscopes as well as working, negotiating meanings and prescribing social actions by means of this particular genre.

5. Myth

Myth is approached from two perspectives here. The beauty myth which touches various aspects of women’s life is discussed as a culture-driven phenomenon as well as a linguistic one manifesting itself in discourse.

Let us begin with definitions in order to establish the most appropriate one for the sake of the article. As for the popular understanding of the concept, according to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1999: 939), myth may be considered as 1) “an idea or story that many people believe, but which is not true [...]”; 2) an ancient story, especially one intended in order to explain natural or historical events: [...]; or 3) this kind of ancient story in general”.

One of the Internet sources¹ extends the number of possible meanings into five and shifts them:

- 1) a traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation, especially one that is concerned

¹ Source: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/myth> [Access date 13.08.2012].

with deities or demigods and explains some practice, rite, or phenomenon of nature; 2) stories or matter of this kind: [...]; 3) any invented story, idea, or concept [...]; 4) an imaginary or fictitious thing or person; or 5) an unproved or false collective belief that is used to justify a social institution.

In the above dictionary definitions, an inescapably social-cultural aspect of myth can be observed. Its linguistic dimension, however, allows to decipher the phenomenon more thoroughly, placing it in discursive context.

It has to be clarified, though, that in spite of a number of linguistic sources and methodologies concerning the study of myth, Barthes's one has been chosen intentionally for the sake of this research. For this reason, his idea is going to be presented more extensively as theoretical and methodological foundation.

To start with a structuralist view on the issue, Claude Lévi-Strauss formulates an obvious claim that myth constitutes an integral part of language [*langue*], it is conveyed through speech [*parole*] and is connected with discourse. According to him, "myth is language: to be known, myth has to be told; it is a part of human speech" (Levi-Strauss; 2011: 430) – as simple as that.

Roland Barthes confirms this necessary connection, though he explains it with his own theory largely basing upon de Saussure's theory of linguistic sign. He asserts (1991: 107) that "myth is a type of speech. [...] a system of communication, [...] a message. [...] it is a mode of signification, a form. [...] since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse". Barthes (ibid.: 113–114) also illustrates the idea graphically and explains how myth parasitizes on language:

in myth there are two semiological systems, one of which is staggered in relation to the other: a linguistic system, the language (or the modes of representation which are assimilated to it), which I shall call the *language-object*, because it is the language which myth gets hold of in order to build its own system; and myth itself, which I shall call *metalanguage*, because it is a second language, in *which* one speaks about the first.

Tab. 1: Myth according to Roland Barthes (1991: 110–126)

language	{	1. signifier / <i>form</i> /	2. signified / <i>meaning</i> /	
		3. sign		
		I SIGNIFIER		II SIGNIFIED
MYTH	{	III SIGN(IFICATION)		

Myth seems to feel best in discourse. As Barthes (ibid.: 118) later explains,

what is invested in the concept is less reality than a certain knowledge of reality [...]. In actual fact, the knowledge contained in a mythical concept is confused, made of yielding, shapeless associations. One must firmly stress this open character of the concept; it is not at all an abstract, purified essence; it is a formless, unstable, nebulous condensation, whose unity and coherence are above all to its function.

Therefore, myth, whose tangible proof is language, dares to create new meanings, but it always benefits from centuries-old, universal truths; it makes use of symbols, associations, archetypes, or stereotypes; it operates in discourse, and like discourse, shows a prescriptive function. In everyday rituals and rites, its fragments are acted out. After all, “myth hides nothing: its function is to distort, not to make disappear” (ibid.: 120).

What is more, the peculiar property and function of myth allowing it to prescribe behaviours acting rather through emotions than intellect, once again finds an explanation in Barthes’s linguistic perspective (ibid.: 124):

in a language, the sign is arbitrary: nothing compels the acoustic image *tree* ‘naturally’ to mean the concept *tree*: the sign, here, is unmotivated. [...] The mythical signification, on the other hand, is never arbitrary; it is always in part motivated, and unavoidably contains some analogy.

This also allows us to assume that certain mythologies, if not all of them, might be created intentionally. Is this the case with the beauty myth?

5.1. The beauty myth

As Naomi Wolf (1991: 66) claims,

the really crucial function that women serve as aspiring beauties is to buy more things for the body [...]. Somehow, somewhere, someone must have figured out that they will buy more things if they are kept in the self-hating, ever-failing, hungry, and sexually insecure state of being aspiring ‘beauties’.

This appears to be a sufficient reason for keeping the beauty myth alive. Its role is to make the economy of the world go round.

Indeed,

the beauty myth tells a story: The quality called ‘beauty’ objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary: Strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful. Women’s beauty must correlate to their fertility, and since this system is based on sexual selection, it is inevitable and changeless (ibid.: 12).

The point is that what the myth tries to impose so daringly is deceitful. Indeed, paradoxically, the myth does not hide anything; it only distorts. Its function is determined by its intention – the intention that seems to be of political and economical character. The mythical meaning is not arbitrary here (it never is); it is partially mo-

tivated and based upon analogies it is provided with by the history. It is by no means natural. However, myth naturalises the concept. As Barthes (1991: 128) claims, myth “transforms history into nature”. This is why myth is so effective.

5.2. Cosmopolitan beauty

Cosmopolitan – what does it actually mean? In fact, the title *cosmopolitan* cannot be only described within its dictionary meaning frames. This would be the purely language level, which undeniably constitutes a general foundation. However, there is a lot more to it. The word, or rather concept, somehow acquires magical properties in the discursive context created *by* and *in* the magazine. Magical or mythical? Perhaps it becomes mythical through magical linguistic tricks it plays upon its readers, through all the magical spells and rituals it promotes and teaches.

Again, let the common understanding of the concept be the starting point. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1999: 310) suggests the following two meanings: 1) “a cosmopolitan place consists of people from many different parts of the world [...] and 2) a cosmopolitan person, belief, opinion etc. shows a wide experience of different people and places”.

Another online source² explains that *cosmopolitan* means: 1) “familiar with and at ease in many different countries and cultures [...]”; 2) including people from many different countries [...]; 3) having an exciting and glamorous character associated with travel and a mixture of cultures [...]; 4) (of a plant or animal) found all over the world”.

The above constitutes the necessary encyclopaedic basis. And where does the magic come from? Let us outline the general discourse framework, its community and intended (or perhaps declared) aims with citing the fragment taken from the *About Us* bookmark on the Cosmopolitan magazine website:

COSMOPOLITAN is the lifestylist – and cheerleader – for millions of fun, fearless females who want to be the best they can in every area of their lives.

Cosmo edit inspires with information on relationships and romance, the best fashion and beauty, the latest on women’s health and well-being, as well as what’s happening in pop culture and entertainment ... and just about everything else fun, fearless females want to know about.

The best-selling magazine in its category, Cosmo has 64 international editions, is published in 35 languages and is distributed in more than over 100 countries, making it one of the most dynamic brands on the planet.

Let this enthusiastic self-portrait be a starting point acting as a specific introduction to the following part – the presentation of the actual research results.

² Source: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/cosmopolitan> [Access date 13.08.2012].

6. Research project

The research is an attempt at looking at the horoscopic discourse critically. It is also an investigation on the functioning of the beauty myth from a socio-linguistic perspective.

The analysed corpus consists of 333 daily horoscopes downloaded from the Cosmopolitan magazine website from 17th January to 13th February 2011. The same material has already been investigated paying special attention to the language of success in the horoscopes and the analysis is to be found in Miś (2011: 174–196). The following article approaches the problem from yet another angle, highlights yet more dimensions in order to explore the subject in greater depth. This time, the research concerns the beauty myth and the field of investigation is narrowed to female beauty. The prime interest is focused on female body and possible complexities or ramifications bound up with it. It must be, however, mentioned that body does not only mean appearance. It entails sexuality, identity, behaviour, social roles and position, social expectations. It is in large measure a social construct after all. Body is subject to all sorts of processes such as civilizing, institutionalizing, rationalizing, medicalization, sexualization, or disciplining (Buczowski: 2005). Body is an individual façade of gender.

The magazine aims at a specific type of target readers. Its

audience includes primarily single, white, upper-middle class women between the ages of 18 and 39. Cosmo includes models of other ethnicities but places an emphasis on Caucasian females. This publication is also directed towards heterosexuals. While an occasional article will discuss the topic of homosexuality, the focus is on how heterosexual women can learn to be accepting and tolerant of “those girls”³.

It is strange that a magazine with a “pro-women” status actually works against them. Wolf (ibid.: 69) critically assesses that

the new wave – initiated in 1965 by the revamped *Cosmopolitan* – is indeed revolutionary [...]. Their formula includes an aspirational, individualist, can-do tone that says that you should be your best and nothing should get in your way; a focus on personal and sexual relationships that affirms female ambition and erotic appetite; and sexualized images of female models that, though only slightly subtler than those aimed at men, are meant to convey female sexual liberation. But the formula must also include an element that contradicts and then undermines the overall prowoman fare: In diet, skin care, and surgery features, it sells women the deadliest version of the beauty myth money can buy.

Indeed, the consequences of this tricky logic women (and men?) are fed up with spread far and wide.

What makes beauty such a rewarding hotbed for the myth from the linguistic point of view? Perhaps the explanation lies in a peculiar property of language:

³ Source: <http://www.oppapers.com/essays/Cosmopolitan-Magazine-Analysis/138221> [Access date: 15.08.2012].

words convey meaning – undoubtedly, but they also communicate values. Vague though it seems, the property allows to express concepts by means of denotation, connotation, and perhaps the most powerful of all – affect. Emotive load/meaning in specific concepts may assure a whole spectrum of benefits if used appropriately and skilfully used.

Let us assume, after Puzynina (1992: 130), that beauty is a positive value in linguistic terms, i.e. something that (people in general, a group of people and) a sender (perceive(s) as good and) consider(s) good. This allows to at least suspect that the beauty myth bases upon this quality as a positive value and interferes in its conceptual frames, builds meanings so that the functioning of the myth is economically and politically beneficial.

And how about cosmopolitan beauty? Is it still a positive value? It seems as if there was no good answer. On the one hand, beauty is beauty. What has been said exhausts the subject – positive – no two ways about it. On the other hand, one may consider the binary opposition *positive value* versus *negative value*, which could imply *real/natural beauty* as opposed to *cosmopolitan/artificial beauty*, the first one standing for a certain universally-accepted-as-positive value, and the latter one being promoted by the mass media, mythical variant making the money-oriented world go round. Even at the very beginning of the considerations, the issue reveals its multidimensional, philosophical perhaps, character difficult to embrace within the several pages of the article. Let us then stop here and accept this generalised idea for the sake of the research.

The abovementioned binary opposition reveals in a sense the mechanism of the beauty myth. The “pure” concept of beauty constitutes an undeniably positive value. This happens to be modified and distorted. Depending on intention, the mythical meaning can be built with the use of different concepts as if added to the conceptual frames of beauty. The beauty myth does not erase beauty, it distorts it. Or is the word *distort* the right one here? On the one hand, it is since what a woman is supposed to do is change her body (broadly understood) unnaturally, i.e. distort it. On the other hand, it is not – a better word could be *idealize*, for she is expected to adjust to ideals/standards at this point in time being promoted. One could not be further from the truth, however. The point is that ideals are ideal because they do not exist. The same is with ideal beauty – it can never be reached. Even more so if the “standards” keep changing. What is more, paradoxically, in order to become ideal, a woman should distort herself.

One thing is certain – “images of women in the beauty myth are reductive and stereotyped” (Wolf; 1991: 50). The linguistic-cultural picture of a cosmopolitan woman – a mythical one – is pretty much body-oriented, which contributes to the shaping of her identity, the way she perceives herself and the reality, the relationships with others etc.

6.1. Horoscopic discourse and the linguistic-cultural picture of cosmopolitan women

The fundamental assumption adopted here is that discourse both reflects and creates reality. The linguistic-cultural picture of a cosmopolitan woman in the horoscopic discourse quoted here allows, therefore, to examine the actual state of matters and the expected, prescribed ideal. Perhaps the latter even more.

Let us demonstrate the ideal with a few examples from the analysed corpus.

According to the beauty myth, women are (should be?) concerned with their bodies. Their appearance matters a lot and they should keep adjusting to the changing fashions since they are being watched all the time:

- (1) The stars say it looks like you're ready for a change. Let your adventurous side out and consider a trendy new hairstyle, or add a few cutting edge fashions to your wardrobe.
- (2) If you're looking for a change, Venus recommends changing your eye shadow or lipstick colour for a dramatic new look.

What is even more important is sexiness. On the must-be-so-and-must-do-so list, being sexy is ranked first. After all, men keep looking at women. Moreover, they are judging if they are irreproachable females:

- (3) The stars say you're hot! Look your sexy best because Venus might send you a sweet and sensual surprise.
- (4) Venus knows that you love to be the center of attention. Grab the spotlight in a sexy way by wearing a far-out piece of jewelry or slightly edgy outfit.
- (5) Feisty Mars ensures that all eyes are on you. Consider sparkling in a seductive outfit tonight.

Women tempt men using their bodies – even centuries-old proverbs confirm that. Therefore, women should always be prepared for a flirty encounter, which is yet again clearly visible in the horoscopes:

- (6) Hot Mars sends you a sensual power boost. Single? Smile at a cutie you want to let him know that you're available. Attached? Give him a peek-a-boo vie with a low-cut sweater and lacy bra.
- (7) Whether you're single or attached, wear a cute bra because Mercury and Mars team up to bring you a few surprises.
- (8) Venus knows that you love to be the center of attention. Grab the spotlight in a sexy way by wearing a far-out piece of jewelry or slightly edgy outfit.
- (9) Thanks to flirty Venus, you're all attitude. No guy should be able to resist your sexy energy so choose your target and make your move.

It is crucial for a cosmopolitan woman to keep her body in shape. Being beautiful requires dedication – diet and strict fitness regimen:

- (10) Venus says to include a nutritious diet in your fitness regimen to ensure that you're as healthy inside as you are hot outside.
- (11) Jupiter says that it's a good day to perfect a personal fitness program that will help you to stay in shape all year.
- (12) Saturn puts the focus on your health. Whether it's a change of diet or time for a check-up, don't neglect your body.

As for eating, there seems to be much more to it. Pleasurable though it is, it turns out to be sinful. This is because eating a dessert works against your beauty and attractiveness. Since being beautiful is more vital than eating to live, it necessarily entails guilt:

- (13) You're the Diva! Eat a sinful dessert. Indulge in some retail therapy. Demand extra man-attention. Whatever you choose, do something just for you today.
- (14) Hey, Diva! The stars have voted that today should be all about you. Indulge a guilty pleasure like having dessert instead of lunch or having your makeup applied (for free) at a beauty counter before a date.

Body is also connected with mind. The proverbial female intuition which has been thought to be their characteristic (inborn?) feature for centuries can be observed in the horoscopes. Women seem to be encouraged to follow their instincts and intuition, emotions perhaps. Stereotypically, reasoning is regarded as typically male after all. Here are a few examples:

- (15) Today, Neptune sharpens your intuition. Let it guide you toward the next step in scoring points in a career or relationship.
- (16) Fickle Jupiter could have you weighing two job offers or choosing between two sexy guys. Follow your gut.
- (17) Psychic Neptune advises you not to ignore your intuition. Whether you're considering a new job or have a weird feeling about a guy that you just met, trust your gut to guide you.

The linguistic picture of women in the discussed discourse reveals their emotionality. This vast array of emotions includes, among others, sensitivity, sympathy, the feeling of guilt, or impatience:

- (18) The Moon makes you super-sensitive – try not to take people's comments to heart.
- (19) Been bad? Don't let a guilt trip put you in a funk. Apologize for being naughty and then forget it.
- (20) Everyone turns to you for help, but save some time for yourself to avoid losing your patience under temperamental Pluto.

Women's ability to feel and show empathy implies that they are people-oriented. They appear to be expected to care about others.

- (21) Neptune says that a friend might feel neglected. Consider inviting her over for dinner and catch-up on each other's lives.

- (22) Focus on a friend who might need some advice with a guy problem.
- (23) You love to chat online or text your pals. However, social Jupiter says that face-to-face meetings help to keep your friendships close. Consider rounding up your crew for some in-person fun.

Being sensitive to people's matters and problems has always been women's task and responsibility in the society and family. It has always been them who were to cherish hearth and home. They are closely tied especially to their female relatives though:

- (24) Venus strengthens family ties. Consider taking your mom or closest female relative to lunch or shopping.
- (25) Consider inviting your family over for dinner. They'll not only appreciate it, but you could receive some dead right love advice.

Whether in order to find solutions or deal with their emotional "overload", women talk. Again, stereotypically, this feature of character is considered to be negative. Perhaps because it is necessarily connected with gossip. It seems, however, that women are encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings and one can discern both beneficial and harmful points in this case:

- (26) Chatty Jupiter advises that gossip might be your best stress buster. Engaging in harmless banter (analyzing the latest crazed reality housewife) can help to take the pressure off.
- (27) Talking with a trusted friend could help you understand your role in a recent romantic drama.
- (28) Single? A conversation with a funny guy could give you butterflies. Attached? It's a good day to calmly discuss one of his annoying habits that's starting to drive you crazy.

Another solution for cosmopolitan women for all sorts of their sorrows is shopping. At least, this is one of the most often prescribed recipes in the horoscopes. Of course, it is important for women to keep updating the content of their wardrobe. Additionally, this can serve as a magical cure or a reward she can treat herself to. The ritual of buying assumes the proportions of magical/religious purification. As the horoscopes suggest, this is highly beneficial for her. Not mentioning the world economy.

- (29) Venus says that you deserve a prize for being a cool chick. Consider buying yourself something trendy, like a piece of chunky jewelry.
- (30) You aren't always the most practical girl around. However, Jupiter says that it's okay to drop a few bucks on a new pair of jeans or a cute top.
- (31) It's a five-star shopping day. Frugal Saturn might create a price war on anything from furniture to fashion. Check newspaper ads and online sales for super savings.

Surprisingly, in the analysed horoscopolical discourse, though little pleasures are approved, women are also cautioned against wasting money. This ambivalence yet

again is very striking. Horoscopol advice includes being careful with financial matters on the one hand and not being too obsessed with them on the other.

- (32) Star warning! Don't waste money on trivial items. If you're in the mood to shop. Make it count by buying an accessory that you can wear with several outfits.
- (33) Money-minded Saturn says that buying a pair of earrings or inexpensive sunglasses shouldn't break your budget. Besides, you deserve it.
- (34) Don't obsess over financial matters. The stars say that you have the power to readjust your spending habits and save more than you think.
- (35) Dreaming of being your own boss? Smart Saturn says that today is a good day to investigate organizations that offer free advice on how to start your own business.
- (36) Your insane schedule can overload you. Taking a few minutes to organize both your personal and work tasks for the week will help you maintain control.

All in all, the prescriptive function of horoscopes as a specific genre strengthens the prescriptive character of the discourse itself. The beauty myth encoded in words and the overall context in which they happen to appear – the context decorated with promises, ideals, “proofs” in the form of models and celebrities, linguistic and visual images – may serve as a manipulative device and surely does. The beauty myth is intensively promoted by the marketplace, beauty advertising makes promises about being brave and free, but to look “beautiful” does not mean to feel so. It is difficult to create new meaning for beauty in the reality which does not really wish to get rid of it. The situation works well both politically and economically in this environment. And as Wolf (ibid.: 277) admits, “as long as the definition of ‘beauty’ comes from outside women, we will continue to be manipulated by it”.

6.2. Linguistic analysis of the beauty myth

What does the definition of artificial/cosmopolitan beauty include? How is it smuggled through discourse? How does language assist the beauty myth?

Let us once again use Barthes's idea and suggest a graphic presentation:

Tab. 2: Graphic presentation of the beauty myth's mechanism

language	{	BEAUTY 1. signifier <i>/form/</i>	BEAUTY AS A POS- ITIVE VALUE 2. signified <i>/meaning/</i>	
		BEAUTY 3. sign I SIGNIFIER		PRESCRIBED BEHAVIOURS CON- CERNING APPEARANCE, SEXU- ALITY, DIETING, SHOPPING, 'FEMININE' FEATURES, etc., WHICH ARE MEANT TO DISTORT THE STOLEN CONCEPT OF BEAUTY AS A POSITIVE VALUE II SIGNIFIED
MYTH	{			ARTIFICIAL/COSMOPOLITAN BEAUTY III SIGN(IFICATION)

At the language level, *beauty* functions as a positive value – pure, universal and undeniable. At the level of myth, its sense gets distorted by the concept. The myth does not erase the sense of beauty, but only alienates it. In this way a new signification is imparted. A mythical word (mythical beauty) is defined rather by its intention than literalness. However, it is as if purified by this literalness. The literalness of sense allows to distance the intentional appropriation of the concept. In this mechanism, words are stolen and then given back, but they are never given back the same since they have been furtively distorted in the meantime. The literal sense of beauty is alienated, but it is still there. New concepts are intentionally added to it so that the beauty myth could serve its fundamental function.

How does it work? The point is that “myth essentially aims at causing an immediate impression – it does not matter if one is later allowed to see through the myth, its action is assumed to be stronger than the rational explanations which may later belie it. This means that the reading of a myth is exhausted at one stroke,” as Barthes (1991: 129) claims. Indeed, women are under a persistent influence of the myth – they necessarily face it every day. Also in the cited horoscopes this aggressiveness, importunity and intention of the beauty myth is clearly visible. If so, why do women yield to it? Because naturalisation of the concept takes place: “myth is experienced as innocent speech: not because its intentions are hidden – if they were hidden, they could not be efficacious – but because they are naturalized” (ibid.: 130). If in a horoscope you are suggested to buy a brand new pair of sunglasses to make you feel better, does it lie to you? Of course not. But the true intention is not to make you happy with a new gadget you can add to your wardrobe, but to actually buy it and make someone else happy with the money you paid for it. By analogy, why are women encouraged to be obsessed with their appearance, sexiness, or diet, and cautioned not to be too obsessed with financial matters or work? Is there anything political in it?

The above can also be explained by means of values which construct the semiological system existing in socio-cultural reality: “any semiological system is a system of values; now the myth-consumer takes the signification for a system of facts: myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system” (ibid.). Then, are values the key to understanding the myth? It may be one of many other possibilities of approaching the problem which has by no means been exhausted in this article – there are still plenty of other aspects and dimensions to be investigated.

7. Concluding remarks

The paper embraces the beauty myth analysis in selected horoscopolical discourse: the myth functions in the discourse and is linguistically represented and realised through the analysed genre, i.e. horoscope.

The beauty myth to which the investigation is narrowed seems to manifest itself at the level of language and change the concepts according to its will and the manipulative purpose it serves. What is observable in the discourse is that mythical concepts concerning female beauty, sexuality and social expectations towards them bring women to confusion, intensify ambivalence. “Women come to confuse sexual looking with being looked at sexually [...]; many confuse sexually feeling with being sexually felt [...]; many confuse desiring with being desirable” (Wolf: 158). In the consumption-oriented environment, both female sexuality and identity are not only negatively defined, but also negatively constructed from the very beginning: “what little girls learn is not the desire for the other, but the desire to be desired” (ibid.: 157). Dieting and various body treatments appear to be “the essence of contemporary femininity” (ibid.: 200).

Specific nature and flexibility of the beauty myth makes it a very powerful persuasive, or rather manipulative, device. However, words – no matter if mythical or not – are not harmful in themselves, only the intentions behind them.

References

- Barthes R., *Mythologies*, The Noonday Press, New York 1991.
- Buczowski A., *Spółeczne tworzenie ciała: płęć kulturowa i płęć biologiczna*, TAIWPN UNIVERSITAS, Kraków 2005.
- Cook G., *The Discourse of Advertising*, Routledge, London, New York 1992.
- Lévi-Strauss C., *The Structural Study of Myth*, “The Journal of American Folklore” Vol. 68, Nr. 270, Myth: A Symposium (Oct. – Dec. 1955), pp. 428–444, American Folklore Society.
- Miś A., *The Linguistic-cultural Picture of Success and Happiness of a Cosmopolitan Woman*, [In:] *Language, Literature and Culture in Present-Day Context: Contemporary Research Perspectives in Anglophone PhD Studies*, eds. Gregová, R., Šnircová, S., and Tomaščíková, S., The Slovak Association for the Study of English, Košice 2011.
- Puzynina J., *Język wartości*, PWN, Warszawa 1992.
- Scollon R. and Scollon S.W., *Discourse and Intercultural Communication*. [In:] *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, eds. Schiffrin D., Tannen D. and Hamilton H.E., Blackwell Publishing 2003.
- Summers D. et al., *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, Pearson Education Limited, 1999.
- Wolf N., *The Beauty Myth*. Vintage Books, London 1991.
- <http://www.cosmomediakit.com/r5/home.asp>
- <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/myth>
- <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/cosmopolitan>
- <http://www.oppapers.com/essays/Cosmopolitan-Magazine-Analysis/138221>

Sources

www.cosmo.com